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Chairman: Mr. RATA (New Zealand)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Tshering (Bhutan), Mr. Rata (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/38, A/50/110, A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/257/Rev.1-E/1995/61/Rev.1, A/50/346, A/50/369, A/50/378, A/50/398, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/538, A/50/611, A/50/744, A/50/747-E/1995/126; A/CONF.127/20 and Add.1*)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued) (A/50/744)

1. Mr. RI SONG IL (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995 had made significant progress in the struggle for equality, development and peace. The Platform for Action adopted at the Conference was a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women through the integration of gender perspectives in all policies and the adoption of concrete measures to benefit women, which must be implemented by the international community and by Member States. It accorded priority to the rapid elimination of poverty, unemployment, disease and illiteracy, which were among the most urgent problems for women in developing countries which had once been colonies. Inequitable economic and trade relations had a negative impact on the development of those countries and, hence, on the situation of women living there; his delegation therefore believed that the advancement of women involved the implementation of strategies aimed at establishing equitable international political and economic relations and that the developed countries had a special responsibility in that respect. Each country had a decisive role to play in enhancing the status of women and must fulfil that responsibility by adopting laws which guaranteed the equal rights of women and men in all fields, at both the constitutional and practical levels. Since the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had always regarded gender equality as a basic element of national social development policy, women were participating actively in the management of State affairs, in the economy and in development. The Constitution guaranteed the equal rights of women in political and social life and contained specific provisions to benefit them. His Government had taken all the necessary measures - free medical care, paid maternity leave, free and compulsory education - to enable women to participate freely in the life of society, in accordance with the spirit of the people-centred socialist system in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

2. His delegation wished to reiterate its deep concern about the problem of the more than 200,000 "comfort women", largely Korean, who had been captured and systematically raped, tortured and often killed by the Japanese army during the Second World War. Despite some recent conciliatory steps, the Japanese Government had never fully admitted its guilt or properly compensated the victims of its past crimes and their families. The Democratic People's Republic

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* To be issued.

of Korea once again urged the Japanese Government to assume fully its political responsibilities by disclosing the whole truth about what had happened, apologizing to the victims of the crimes and providing full compensation at the State level.

3. Mr. LEE (Republic of Korea) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had confirmed the critical notion that the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life and recognition of women's rights as basic rights were two goals that were inseparable from the achievement of sustainable development. Through the participation of a wide range of actors, from world leaders to representatives of non-governmental organizations, the Conference had also been able to draw unprecedented attention to the issues facing women, particularly at the grass-roots level. The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which proposed new directions for ensuring the full participation of women and gender equality, would depend, in the first place, on the commitment of the leaders of each country to making the necessary institutional and financial arrangements. Each Government, given the countless tasks facing it, should identify its own strategic goals and national priorities, within the framework of the 12 critical areas of concern set out in the Platform for Action.

4. His Government, believing that the achievement of gender equality through the lasting empowerment of women at all levels was one of the policy priorities in the implementation of the Platform for Action, was currently drawing up a national plan to strengthen the participation of women in society. The plan included the enactment of a basic law on gender equality which would facilitate the integration of a gender perspective into national policies, an increase in the ratio of women in senior governmental positions by the year 2000, the adoption of concrete measures to assist working mothers, the hosting of national, regional and international meetings at the centre for women recently established to monitor the follow-up to the recommendations of the Conference and the publication and distribution of the entire text of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in order to further educate the public, regardless of gender, about the indispensable role of women in society.

5. At the international level, the implementation of the outcome of the Conference would depend primarily on global cooperation and partnership, especially in the area of the eradication of poverty among women, which remained one of the most serious obstacles to the advancement of women. The Republic of Korea stressed in that respect the vital importance of enhancing cooperation between developed countries and international financial organizations to eliminate the threat of poverty for women in developing countries, especially the least developed countries. Global social development efforts must place special focus on women because they were the primary victims of discrimination and social injustice and because sustainable development could be achieved only through equal rights and opportunities for women in the areas of education, health and family planning. In order to ensure that existing social institutions which perpetuated discrimination against women put an end to their practices, the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women must be adequately taken into account when formulating global social development programmes.

6. Since women victims of conflict and refugees needed special protection, his delegation stressed the importance of the section of the Platform for Action concerned with the advancement of peace, conflict resolution and reduction of the impact of armed and other conflicts on women and would continue to support all measures to protect the basic rights of women. Although it was primarily the responsibility of each country to ensure the proper institutional arrangements for the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the United Nations had an invaluable coordinating role. In that regard, the mechanisms for the advancement of women within the United Nations system must be strengthened and United Nations bodies must accord greater emphasis to women's affairs. The proposed merger of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) should be considered in that context.

7. Non-governmental organizations had made consistent and concerted efforts during the preparatory process and the proceedings of the Beijing Conference, and they deserved greater attention as partners and as important actors in implementing its recommendations. They could play a pivotal role in attracting the attention of national policy makers and in giving women at all levels of society an opportunity to know their rights guaranteed in the Beijing Declaration and Programme for Action.

8. At the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, women had at last taken their due place in the agenda of the Organization. The Republic of Korea recognized the efforts and achievements of the United Nations over the past half-century in the advancement of women, although much remained to be done. His Government hoped to see the Organization redouble its efforts in that area, and expressed its commitment to fully support and cooperate with those efforts.

9. Ms. BUCK (Canada) welcomed the fact that, 50 years after the establishment of the United Nations, the promotion of women's equality and rights had become an essential element in the Organization's efforts to secure equality, development and peace in the world. The Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women clearly showed the determination of States to promote women's rights. Her Government had accorded the highest priority to the development of that master plan, which emphasized the duty of States to adopt actions and policies to empower women. However, while Governments had primary responsibility for implementing the Platform for Action, the role of the United Nations system was critically important in providing support and a forum for deliberation. Her Government therefore considered that the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women, the focal point for United Nations efforts to eliminate gender-based discrimination, should be reviewed and strengthened. The Commission should have a central role in monitoring implementation of the Platform for Action and in assisting the Economic and Social Council in coordination of reporting on implementation, in conjunction with an inter-agency mechanism. It should also play a part in the integration of gender perspective throughout the activities of the United Nations system. A review of the mandate of the Commission would also require a reassessment of the functions of the Division for the Advancement of Women, including its role in the implementation of the Platform and particularly of the system-wide medium-term plan for the

advancement of women from 1996 to 2001, in the light of the recommendations of the Beijing Conference. Canada would continue to work with other States and with the Division to identify ways in which that could be accomplished.

10. It was critically important to ensure system-wide coordination of activities for the advancement of women arising out of other United Nations conferences such as the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, and the World Summit for Social Development.

11. Her delegation was pleased to note the recommendations of the Secretary-General with regard to ensuring that gender issues were integrated into overall policy-making and programming and taken into account in all aspects of the work of the system. It also welcomed his proposal to establish a high-level board on the advancement of women to advise him on the follow-up to the Conference, and applauded his recent decision to create inter-agency task forces to support country-level follow-up to United Nations conference agreements. The work of each of those task forces would benefit greatly from taking account of the gender dimension. It also supported the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a fourth inter-agency task force on the empowerment and advancement of women to work on the follow-up to the Conference. In a recent statement to the General Assembly, her delegation had emphasized the need to improve cooperation with and among the specialized agencies in order to make the best possible use of the limited resources available to the United Nations. The executive heads of those bodies should coordinate the follow-up to international conferences in order to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication.

12. Since the World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Canada had made great progress in its efforts to achieve equality for women. In order to go even farther, just before the Beijing Conference, her Government had published a Federal Plan for Gender Equality. Among its commitments, it was proposed that gender analysis should be applied to the development of national policies, programmes and legislation, in order to assess their potential gender impact. She hoped that the plan would result in improvements in the daily lives of women and men.

13. Efficient implementation of the Platform for Action would depend on the support it received from non-governmental organizations, whose participation had been a key element in the success of the Conference. Public interest and the active involvement of all sectors of society would add impetus to the international efforts of the United Nations and the national efforts of Member States. Accordingly, the Commission on the Status of Women might wish to review how the broad range of independent actors involved in the Conference might be included in its work. States might wish to consider enabling representatives of civil society to take part in the preparation of their national implementation strategies.

14. Mrs. MONTOUSSAMY-ASHE (United States of America) said that the Beijing Conference, far from simply reaffirming the achievements of previous United Nations conferences, had produced a Platform for Action which was genuinely designed to empower women, emphasizing their role as agents of change rather than as passive beneficiaries. It also showed what obstacles remained, and what

must be done to overcome them. It was the first time that a document directed at the advancement of women had been framed in the context of human rights and economic independence, stressing the rights and freedoms of the individual. Another characteristic of the Platform was its focus on practical steps to ensure integration of women into all political, social and economic spheres, in a decision-making role. Throughout the preparations for the Conference, those involved had been constantly reminded that one of its main purposes was to mobilize women and men at all levels to work together for the advancement of women. Individuals and non-governmental organizations must continue to work together and with Governments to build the necessary political will to effect change. At Beijing, many Governments had announced measures which they had implemented, or undertook to implement, to advance the status of women in their countries.

15. At the same time, it was necessary to strengthen the capacities of the United Nations in that area. Effective implementation of the Platform would require changes in the internal dynamics of institutions and organizations, particularly in respect of values, behaviour, rules and procedures that obstructed the advancement of women. The United Nations should integrate gender perspective into all its activities, thereby demonstrating its commitment and giving an example to the international community as a whole. The Organization must also coordinate its work and monitor the implementation of the Platform. Her delegation welcomed the intention of the Commission on the Status of Women to review its work programme, which would enable it to carry out more dynamically its catalytic role in the implementation of the Platform for Action. It also looked forward to the establishment, within existing human and financial resources, of a high-level post in the Office of the Secretary-General, to act as his adviser on gender issues and to help ensure system-wide implementation of the Platform for Action, working in close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women. The majority of the Platform's objectives could be accomplished through political, economic, and institutional changes which would establish priorities and target appropriate financial resources in support of women and girls. If the process was to move forward, political will at all levels would be absolutely vital.

16. Mr. MISTRÍK (Slovakia) said that the profound changes that had swept Slovakia in recent years had greatly influenced the behaviour and attitudes of its citizens, particularly women. The climate generated by a democratic, emancipated society had enabled women to take sovereign responsibility for solving their economic and social problems, to secure pluralism of opinions and obtain more information in the sphere of human rights, especially women's rights.

17. That transformation process, however, had also had a negative impact on women's employment and on crime against women. Moreover, although 13 per cent of the deputies in Parliament were women and three women held ministerial posts, a conspicuous gap remained between the number of well-educated women and the number who managed to occupy responsible and managerial positions.

18. Traditional family values remained deeply entrenched in Slovakia. The Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women recalled that women's equality began in the family. In that respect, it was necessary to

break traditional male dominance and educate women to have faith in their own skills and decision-making abilities.

19. His Government supported the strengthening of international cooperation in the implementation of programmes for the advancement of women. It was fully aware of the necessity of respecting women's needs and had paid enormous attention to national and international activities connected with the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women. As a member of the Commission on the Status of Women, Slovakia had participated actively in the preparation of the final document of the Conference and its Platform for Action.

20. With regard to the implementation and follow-up of the outcome of the Beijing Conference, his Government would focus on the status of women and on creating the requisite conditions for the implementation of the conclusions reached at the Conference in the area of economic development, primarily in the sphere of small and medium-sized enterprises. It would also support an increase in the number of women in the United Nations Secretariat and in the specialized agencies, particularly at senior levels.

21. His delegation believed that the Beijing Conference had taken a major step forward in defending women's rights by recalling that those rights were indivisible from other human rights.

22. Ms. HOWARTH WILES (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that, over the past five years, UNHCR had made significant progress in ensuring that the situation of refugee women was specifically addressed in all aspects of its protection and assistance activities. Its policy and guidelines on refugee women had served to make staff and implementing partners aware of the hardships and vulnerabilities particular to that population group. Major training programmes, including training in emergency management, protection and programming, now included a gender training module, which had been made more accessible through the involvement of local non-governmental organizations as trainers. That concern to address women's needs had resulted in several far-reaching changes in UNHCR programme delivery. Any new emergency response now included action by community service officers to assess particular vulnerabilities at the earliest stage. UNHCR offered both physical and legal protection to refugees and had developed new guidelines aimed at preventing violence against women. Several countries had already put in place measures to ensure that asylum procedures were responsive to the specific needs of female applicants. It was also expected that informing refugees of their legal rights and responsibilities would enhance security in refugee camps. UNHCR was working with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to address the lack of reproductive health services in its activities. Greater attention was also being paid to the development of gender-disaggregated statistics, and registration procedures and needs assessment tools now ensured that the gender differential was addressed.

23. Despite the increasing focus on the plight of women refugees, UNHCR remained concerned that its policy and guidelines on refugee women were not being implemented sufficiently at the field level. One particular concern was the lack of participation by refugee women in the planning of activities and in the refugee committees established to administer camps. It was important, for

instance, to ensure that women received their fair share of food and other distributed items.

24. UNHCR had been actively involved in the regional preparatory meetings for the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as in the Conference itself. In close cooperation with Governments, non-governmental organizations and refugee women, it had succeeded in ensuring that the particular needs of refugee women, specifically with regard to human rights, violence and the impact of armed conflict, were well addressed throughout the Platform for Action. Efforts must now be made to implement the recommendations contained in the Platform for Action in the coming years. UNHCR would base its own action on those recommendations and the recommendations of the conferences on the environment, human rights, population and social development that had preceded the Beijing Conference. A senior-level task force would monitor the implementation of work plans, while four new field staff would provide advice and monitor progress at the regional level. At the national level, field focal points established in preparation for the Beijing Conference would be strengthened. UNHCR was already implementing a policy aimed at recruiting more women, particularly to senior positions. Gender training would be an essential training component for representatives and newly recruited staff, while knowledge of UNHCR policies and guidelines on refugee women would be among the core competencies identified for career advancement.

25. UNHCR recognized the importance of inter-agency cooperation and cooperation by non-governmental organizations in those efforts. Memoranda of understanding had already been signed with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNFPA and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), while negotiations with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were nearing completion. UNHCR expected to take full account of the comparative advantages of each organization and to avoid any potential duplication of efforts. Its cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women had resulted in greater exposure of the particular protection problems of refugee women. Gender concerns had also been identified as an important focus of its initiative with non-governmental organizations, known as Partnership in Action (PARINAC).

26. Implementation of the Platform for Action necessitated not only commitment at the highest level throughout the United Nations system but also tapping the full potential of the focal points for women in many United Nations agencies, which were not only a significant resource for the Commission on the Status of Women but also strategically placed catalysts for change.

27. Ms. HUTJES (Netherlands) observed that despite the adoption in 1979 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, many countries still had not officially recognized the equality of men and women. The Netherlands urged those countries which had not acceded to the Convention to do so and those which had entered reservations to withdraw them.

28. The final document of the Beijing Conference called on Governments to support the process leading to the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on a right of petition procedure, and her Government welcomed that initiative, which it had always favoured.

29. The Netherlands would also actively support the work of the new Special Rapporteur on violence against women, by systematically collecting relevant information. It was vital for Member States to contribute to the efforts made by the Organization.

30. The transfer to New York of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the outcome of the Beijing Conference had brought new opportunities for integrating gender perspective into all United Nations activities system-wide. As a precondition, however, all United Nations organizations should have the necessary instruments at their disposal. Her Government was currently developing a procedure for assessing the impact of policy approaches on women, which might also prove useful in measuring the impact of the Platform for Action on national policies.

31. The 1995 Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in preparation for the Beijing Conference concluded that nowhere in the world did women have the same opportunities as men. Even in the Netherlands, women earned a quarter of the national income while they held 40 per cent of the jobs, and their average income was barely 76 per cent of that of men. It was gratifying to note that paragraph 165 (g) of the Platform for Action called for the measurement, on a world-wide scale, of unremunerated work done by women. Also to be welcomed was the progress made in education, health care and inheritance rights of girls, the struggle against family violence, trafficking in women and other forms of violence against women, and the recognition that sexual rights were basic rights.

32. The 189 countries participating in the Beijing Conference had committed themselves to implement the Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective was reflected in all their policies and programmes. Much needed to be done at the national level to combat de facto discrimination; and specific action should be taken on that score. A situation in which the requirements of only half of the world's population were taken into consideration was unacceptable. Men would also have to assume responsibility in the matter. It was a question of political will as well, and her own Government had agreed to incorporate the Beijing recommendations into a new equal rights policy document to be issued in the fall.

33. The world's population had more than doubled in 50 years. It should, however, be possible to stabilize it, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), if women participated on an equal footing with men in all aspects of the development process.

34. By the year 2005, half of the world's population would be concentrated in urban areas, which would lead to a growing demand for sanitation and social and health infrastructures in the cities. The numbers of homeless people were rising dramatically in the industrialized countries. The goal of sustainable development could be achieved only if all became involved, and women in particular. Women must contribute equally and to the same extent as men to decision-making at the community level.

35. Non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, were fortunately occupying an increasingly prominent position in United Nations world conferences, such as the City Summit. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and three international non-governmental organizations dealing with women's issues had issued a joint statement in which equal access to land, property and credit was presented as a priority issue. In the preparations for Habitat II, representatives of non-governmental organizations had been included in the drafting group which was drawing up the draft final document.

36. It was high time for all the parties involved - local authorities, the private sector and community-based organizations and not merely Governments - to cooperate actively and effectively to build the future. Women would continue to call for such participation based on political will, commitment and shared responsibility for men.

37. Ms. GRAYSON (World Bank) said that since the World Bank attached the highest importance to women's rights, it had sent a delegation headed by the President of the Bank to the Beijing Conference. It had also organized a series of seminars entitled "Beyond Beijing: Acting on Commitments to the World's Women", in order to keep the momentum of the Conference alive. In Beijing, the World Bank had made a commitment to the education of girls. It was planning to allocate about $900 million a year to that sector and was proposing two specific goals for the year 2010: that all girls should complete primary school and that an equal proportion of girls and boys - 60 per cent - would go to secondary school. A plan of action was now being mapped out, in collaboration with partners like the United Nations agencies, donors, non-governmental organizations and, most importantly, the recipient countries, to make those goals a reality by focusing on the allocation of resources, the lending priorities and the follow-up to action undertaken.

38. Education was the key to escaping from a life of poverty, but it was not enough without good health. The World Bank was already the largest source of external financing for reproductive health care, primary health care and HIV/AIDS prevention. On the financial score, World Bank research in Bangladesh had shown that, with a loan of as little as $100, a woman could double her family's income and, indeed, often lift her family out of poverty in five years. It was therefore moving ahead with its $200-million micro-finance programmes in the developing countries, and it hoped that micro-finance would become an important future activity.

39. Women must also enjoy real equality of opportunity in the workplace and be able to participate in decision-making. A country needed to grow in order to generate jobs and to ensure, through legislation and allocation of funds, that men and women had equal access to jobs, services, credit and property. The World Bank advocated such a strategy to its client countries. It was also setting up a fund to enable women to take more of a part in decision-making, in conflict prevention and resolution and in management. Consultations with women's organizations had already taken place in Africa, specifically in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana and Zambia.

40. The World Bank planned to monitor its own progress as time went on. It was holding itself to the goal of improving the gender balance within the Bank

itself, where women already now constituted about 31 per cent of the advanced professional staff. The World Bank had also been making an effort to create a more supportive environment; it had instituted an expanded family leave policy, alternative work schedules, counselling and information programmes, and strict rules against any kind of harassment.

41. Mrs. RADUCHOWSKA-BROCHWICZ (Poland) said that much had already been done in Poland for the economic and social advancement of women and that the main problems that persisted were high unemployment rates among the female economically active population, unequal access to managerial positions and failure to observe the principle of equal pay for equal work. Some of those problems were a result of the major systemic transformations under way in Poland, but all of them deserved special attention. It was not just a question of amending obsolete laws and regulations but also of changing habits and attitudes. In order to reap the benefits of the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, long-term measures for its implementation should be envisaged immediately. Closer cooperation among Governments of the same region and better coordination among regional and subregional organizations should be established.

42. Her delegation also proposed strengthening or, where appropriate, establishing focal points on women within the regional commissions, in keeping with the recommendation in paragraph 301 of the Platform for Action. It commended the Economic Commission for Europe for its contribution to the regional preparatory process for the Conference, in particular within the framework of assistance to countries in transition. In that connection, it would welcome future assistance in capacity-building for the advancement of women in countries in transition. Her delegation also believed that the future role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Eastern Europe should be strengthened, since the Consultative Committee on UNIFEM had recognized that there was no reason why the Fund should not operate in that region. It hoped that the Third Committee would support that recommendation, which had already been adopted by the Consultative Committee.

43. Ms. WONG (Australia) said that, two months after the Fourth World Conference on Women, it was time to start implementing the Platform for Action within the best possible institutional framework. The General Assembly, which had overall responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the outcome of the Conference and for reviewing the progress made should integrate gender issues throughout its work. The 1996 review of the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women would afford an opportunity to improve the Commission's capacity to play a central role in monitoring the system-wide implementation of the Platform for Action, a role which would require a strong secretariat and adequate resources. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to establish a high-level board to advise him on the advancement of women, to introduce innovative approaches to follow-up and, above all, to ensure the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat.

44. The Economic and Social Council was to ensure that the follow-up to recent world conferences was coordinated and integrated, and it had already devoted special segments to the advancement of women and, specifically, to follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Her delegation encouraged United Nations funds and

agencies to adjust their programmes to the Platform for Action and welcomed the commitment by the Administrative Committee on Coordination to ensuring that the advancement of women became a policy priority within the common system and that the status of women in the different secretariats was improved.

45. Her Government was currently analysing the Platform for Action, especially the recommendations contained therein, and would subsequently mandate government agencies to develop programmes incorporating and addressing the critical issues of concern to women. As had been manifest in the discussions at Beijing, the most serious difficulties were faced by women living in developing countries and in communities which depended on the support provided through development assistance programmes. The donor community should therefore use the Platform for Action as a guide to the priority issues that needed to be incorporated in development assistance activities. Her Government, through its development assistance agency AUSAID, was preparing a report which would help to ensure that women's concerns were incorporated in the design and implementation of activities supported through the Australian aid programme. The most pressing issues for Australian women were increasing women's involvement in decision-making, preventing violence against women, improving access to appropriate health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and helping women balance work and family responsibilities.

46. At the regional level, Australia had played the lead role in preparations for the Conference. At Beijing, it had undertaken to assist Pacific island countries in implementing their priority programmes and commitments identified on that occasion. Consultations had already begun with a number of countries in the Pacific, not only with Governments but also with women's groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community organizations. In that regard, the Fourth World Conference on Women had revealed the valuable contribution to be made by NGOs. Those organizations had already embarked globally on follow-up activities and her delegation hoped that the Commission on the Status of Women would continue the dialogue and interaction with them.

47. It was encouraging to note that there were now 143 States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and that other States were thinking of ratifying it; her delegation urged them to do so. Her delegation welcomed the decision taken in May 1995 to amend article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention to remove the two-week limit on the annual meetings of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It also looked forward to considering the question of an optional protocol to the Convention at the next meeting of the Commission on the Status on Women.

48. Mrs. CHIGAGA (Zambia) associated herself with the statement made by the Philippine delegation on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Since the Chairperson of the 12 member States of the Southern Africa Development Community would be making a comprehensive statement on agenda items 107 and 165, she would confine her own statement to comments on the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/50/744). In her delegation's view, one of the overriding messages of the Conference was that the objectives of the Platform for Action must be translated into concrete policies and actions in order to ensure the advancement of women. To that end, the activities of

institutions at all levels must be reoriented to expedite implementation of the Platform for Action. Above all, a policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective must be promoted by Governments, the United Nations system and all other relevant organizations.

49. The Secretary-General stated in the summary that the report focused on those recommendations which had immediate implications for action at the international level, including those requiring consideration by the General Assembly at its current session. Her delegation therefore awaited with interest the Secretary-General's proposals to the Commission on the Status of Women at its next session, which it believed would assist the Commission in developing a work programme to follow up the Platform for Action. It also hoped that he would submit proposals on mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action at all levels, a move that would facilitate meaningful debate in the Commission. While noting with satisfaction the content of paragraph 19 of the Secretary-General's report, she wished to point out that a number of the Secretary-General's proposals did not quite point in the direction of an integrated, effective follow-up to the Fourth World Conference. They might in fact be more conducive to maintenance of the status quo, with further duplication of effort, than to a stronger programme characterized by unity of purpose and action within the United Nations system. In the absence of a focal point within the system to ensure a more focused approach, reviewing and strengthening the strategies and working methods of different United Nations mechanisms might not be enough. In her delegation's view, that might be one of the reasons why the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies had not been implemented fully. Although the Division for the Advancement of Women had been designated as the focal point for implementation of the Strategies, its focus had been on policy orientation and substantive servicing of the Commission on the Status of Women, with minimal involvement in operational activities. The resulting lack of coordination and accountability within the system had been responsible for the absence of any concrete follow-up to the implementation of the Strategies. While accepting the idea that organizational entities would exercise their line responsibilities for implementing the relevant recommendations in the Platform for Action, her delegation felt that it was imperative to establish an operational focal point. It was not entirely convinced that the proposed inter-agency task force would be sufficient, since its operation assumed the existence of an entity whose primary task would be implementation. No lead agency for the advancement of women had as yet been identified. Her delegation was not in favour of the proposal to integrate the functions of adviser on gender issues into the portfolio of one of the senior advisers in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, which it feared would result in the continued marginalization of gender issues, especially in view of the fact that the senior adviser would not have line responsibilities. Under those circumstances, it was difficult to see how effective overview and coordination could be ensured. In her delegation's view, that approach was at variance with the recommendations of the Conference, which had envisaged the role of the Secretary-General's adviser on gender issues as being that of helping to ensure system-wide implementation of the Platform for Action in close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women. Her delegation would not be opposed to giving one of the Secretary-General's senior advisers exclusive responsibility for that crucial task, within existing human and financial resources. While it was certainly important for all statements and reports emanating from the Secretary-General to

be gender-sensitive, her delegation considered that the main emphasis should be on operational gender mainstreaming and coordination. Further thought should be given to the best mechanism for coordinating the work of the adviser on gender issues, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and other concerned units. The effectiveness of those institutions, which had an important role to play in performing the tasks envisaged in the Platform for Action, must be strengthened by providing them with sufficient human and financial resources from the Organization's regular budget. Her delegation felt that over the years there had not been enough investment in the advancement of women, and it appealed to the Secretary-General to make up for that deficiency.

50. Her delegation noted with interest the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a high-level board on the advancement of women to advise him on the follow-up to the Conference, but felt that the idea needed further development. It was not entirely convinced that the board would not duplicate the activities of the Commission on the Status of Women. If appointments to the Commission took account of individuals' expertise and areas of specialization, the Secretary-General would be able to obtain the advice he was looking for from them. Such an approach would also be conducive to greater transparency.

51. Her delegation welcomed with enthusiasm the news that concerned organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, would be invited to participate in the proposed inter-agency task force (para. 87) and hoped that such interaction might also be extended to intergovernmental bodies, a move that would facilitate implementation of the recommendation contained in paragraph 354 of the Platform for Action (para. 85).

52. Her delegation also believed that the Economic and Social Council had an extremely important role to play in that regard, since it was particularly well placed to address the social and economic aspects of the Platform for Action. It therefore looked forward to the conclusion of the process of revitalizing the Council to make it an effective policy-making organ.

53. Turning to the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women (para. 88), her delegation was reserving its position regarding the substantive debate, since it wished to satisfy itself that the proposed approach would in fact facilitate the advancement of women rather than perpetrate the marginalization of gender issues, as had been the case to date.

54. Ms. SHARFMAN (Israel), speaking on agenda item 107, said that her delegation acknowledged the success of the Fourth World Conference on Women and welcomed the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing. In Israel, all women's organizations, including those that had not participated in the Conference, had already met to discuss follow-up action. It had been decided to set up a committee to study the reports of the Conference and discuss how to implement their recommendations and decisions. The committee would work in coordination with the Prime Minister's adviser on women's issues, bringing together representatives of non-governmental organizations and the Government.

55. Several factors threatened to hinder the implementation of the Platform for Action, especially in the area of development. On the whole, women continued to be excluded from political life. Although some gains had been made, their situation remained bleak. Even at the United Nations, 50 years after the establishment of the Organization, women's views still failed to carry weight on organizational, economic and political matters. Her delegation firmly hoped to see greater participation by women at high levels in international bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the near future and believed that affirmative action should be taken to secure equality for women in international organizations and the public sector. Gender discrimination, which kept women in a position of dependence and vulnerability, also threatened to frustrate implementation of the Platform for Action. Her delegation opposed policies based on such discrimination, inasmuch as they reinforced sexual stereotypes and confined women to male-defined roles. Moreover, implementation of the Platform for Action called for full recognition in practice of women's rights as human rights, a principle endorsed by the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights.

56. Like other developed countries, Israel placed its knowledge and experience at the service of developing countries, particularly women in those countries. The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre provided training courses for women to enhance their knowledge and skills in different areas (early childhood education, welfare services and community development and organization, among others), making them more self-reliant and capable of contributing to their country's development. The Centre, which was run by women, also offered annual training courses on the organization and management of income-generating projects, and organized symposia that were attended by women leaders from all over the world.

57. Peace in the Middle East, which had for so long seemed unattainable, was now within the grasp of Israelis and Palestinians. In the light of recent advances in the peace process, increasing numbers of Israeli and Palestinian women had been able to meet and join forces against discrimination, intolerance, extremism and other threats to their rights and to their potential for achievement. Israeli and Palestinian women had already participated in various meetings and regional conferences, such as the Mediterranean and European Women's Summit held at Marrakesh from 27 to 29 May 1994.

58. The key to cementing peace in the Middle East was to forge a culture of peace. Since women had a major role to play in that process, especially at the grass-roots level, it was important to promote their cooperation at the regional level.

59. Ms. AMORIM (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO)) said that, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNESCO had drawn up an agenda for gender equality in which it committed itself to strengthening, in cooperation with Member States and international partners, programmes targeted at the advancement of women. The first commitment made by UNESCO in that regard was to promote education for women's self-empowerment at all levels and in all fields. The agenda also encouraged equal access to knowledge in all fields, particularly science and technology, and increased participation by women in higher education and

training programmes. It also called for the promotion of women's human rights; their attainment of full citizenship and of equal participation with men in policy-making; the enhancement of their creativity and freedom of expression; and support for pluralistic, editorially independent media.

60. The agenda also called for assistance in building a culture of peace by recognizing women's capacities and contributions. Within that framework, UNESCO had prepared a statement on women's contribution to peace which it planned to distribute to educational establishments and in which it stressed the crucial link between peace, development and gender equality and the need for human rights education. The statement had been signed by many women leaders during the Beijing Conference.

61. The 1993 Ouagadougou Declaration on the Education of Girls in Africa had identified priority areas for regional and national action to improve girls' educational opportunities. As a follow-up to the Declaration, UNESCO had set up technical and vocational training projects to enable women to earn an income and free them from low-skill jobs. UNESCO also encouraged distance education by a number of means (community radio, mobile teacher teams, mobile libraries, etc.). During the Beijing Conference, UNESCO had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh to finance women's development programmes in rural and very poor areas of Bangladesh.

62. In its medium-term strategy for 1996-2001, pursuant to the recommendations made in strategic objective B.5 of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNESCO planned to contribute to the evaluation of progress achieved in the elimination of differences between the sexes with regard to access to education and to provide technical assistance to close that gap. It also planned to emphasize women's fundamental human rights and, in particular, to ensure that they could enjoy the totality of their rights and participate more effectively, on an equal footing with men, in all aspects of social life. To that end, UNESCO was committed to developing legal literacy programmes to educate women about their rights and to intensifying its efforts to mobilize public opinion against all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

63. Mrs. BARGHOUTI (Observer for Palestine), speaking on agenda item 107, said that there had been considerable progress in the advancement of women since the first international women's conference held in Mexico in 1975, but that many problems remained (armed conflict, civil and ethnic wars, new forms of racism and racial discrimination, foreign occupation and domination, extreme poverty, illiteracy, and increasing numbers of refugees and displaced women). The Fourth World Conference on Women had adopted a realistic Platform for Action and had set up concrete mechanisms for implementing the goals and objectives of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. The Conference had made it possible for women from all over the world to exchange views, in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation on ways of enhancing the status of women. Her delegation once again expressed its deep appreciation to the people and Government of China for hosting the Conference and contributing to its success.

64. In order to meet the challenges currently facing women, the international community must be genuinely determined to enhance their status and protect their rights and also to mobilize the necessary resources to that end. Implementation

of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would depend largely on the participation of women in policy- and decision-making.

65. With regard to Palestinian women, the Middle East peace process had helped to improve their situation by improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people in general. Serious obstacles remained, however: harsh economic conditions, the building and expansion of Israeli settlements, the isolation and closure of areas of the occupied territory, including Jerusalem, and land and water confiscation all had a detrimental effect on the situation of Palestinian women and children, who were already suffering from the disastrous consequences of long years of occupation (rising numbers of refugees and displaced persons, break-up of families, deterioration of health conditions, poor education, rising unemployment and depletion of the environment). Those difficulties, had not, however, prevented Palestinian women from continuing their struggle and securing recognition of their equality with Palestinian men in the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence. One of their current priorities was to adopt a declaration of principles on the rights of women and to ensure that its stipulations were incorporated in the Constitution and laws of the Palestinian National Authority. Another goal was the establishment of an official mechanism for monitoring women's issues, based on grass-roots organizations and vested with the necessary authority to influence decisions of the Palestinian National Authority. Palestinian women's active involvement as voters and candidates in the upcoming elections would allow them to make concrete progress towards achieving their goals.

66. The inclusion in the Beijing Platform for Action of the concerns of women living under foreign occupation demonstrated the international community's continuing support for Palestinian women in their struggle for independence and freedom. The implementation of the Platform for Action would help to alleviate their suffering and enable them to take a step forward on the path to equality and prosperity.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.